



SATURDAY, MARCH 3, 1906.

too late!

"Too late? What do you mean? Have you dared to ask her to be your wife?" Had Karloff held her arm at this moment, he would have comprehended many things.

"No, no! My word has gone forth to my government; there is a wall behind me, and I can not go back. To stop means worse than death. My property will be confiscated and my name obliterated, my body rot slowly in the frozen north. Oh, I know my country; one does not gain her gratitude by failure. I must have those plans, and nowhere could I obtain such perfect ones."

"Then you will give her up?" There was a broken note.

The count smiled. To her it was a smile scarce less than a snarl.

"Give her up? Yes, as a mother gives up her child, as a lioness her cub. She has refused me, but nevertheless she shall be my wife. Oh, I am well-versed in human nature. She loves her father and I know what sacrifices she would make to save his honor. To-night!" But his lips suddenly closed.

"Well, to-night? Why do you not go on?" Mrs. Chadwick was pale. Her gloved hands were clenched. A spasm of some sort seemed to hold her in its shivering grasp.

"Nothing, nothing! In heaven's name, why have you stirred me so?" he cried.

"Supposing, after all, I loved you?"

He retreated. "Madam, your suppositions are becoming intolerable as impossible."

"Nothing is impossible. Suppose I loved you as violently and passionately as you love this girl?"

"Madam,"—haughty and with gentleness, "do not say anything which may cause me to blush for you; say nothing you may regret to-morrow."

"I am a woman of circumspection. My suppositions are merely argumentative. Do you realize, Count, that I could force you to marry me?"

Karloff's astonishment could not be equalled. "Force me to marry you?"

"Is the thought so distasteful, then?"

"You are mad to-night."

"Not so. In whatever manner you have succeeded in this country, your debt of gratitude is owing to me. I do not recall this fact as a reproach; I make the statement to bear me on in what I have to submit to your discerning intelligence. I doubt if there is another woman, here or abroad, who knows you so well as I. Your personal honor is beyond impeachment but Russia is making vast efforts to speckle it. She will succeed, yes, I could force you to marry me. With a word I could tumble your house of cards. I am a worldly woman and not without wit and address. I possess every one of your letters, most of all have I treasured the extravagant ones. To some you have signed your name. If you have kept mine, you will observe that my given name might mean any one of a thousand women who are named 'Grace.' Shall you marry me? Shall I tumble your house of cards? I could go to Col. Annesley and say to him that if he delivers these plans to you, I shall denounce him to the secret service officers. I might cause his utter financial ruin, but his name would descend to his daughter untarnished."

"You would not dare!" the count interrupted.

"What? And you know me so well? I have not given you my word to reveal nothing. You confided in my rare quality of silence; you confided in me because you had proved me. Man is not infallible, even when he is named Karloff." She lifted from a vase her flowers, from which she shook the water. "Laws have been passed or annulled; laws have died at the executive desk. Who told you that this was to be, or that, long before it came to pass? In all the successful intrigues of Russia in this country, whom have

the pit! I must have looked exceedingly well . . . that night!"—drily.

"You are very bitter to-night. Had you taken me at my word, I never should have looked at Miss Annesley. And had I ceased to love you, not even you would have known it."

"Is it possible?"—ironically.

"It is. I have too much pride to permit a woman to see that I have made a mistake."

"Then you consider in the present instance that you have not made a mistake? You are frank."

"At least I have not made a mistake which I can not rectify. Madam, let us not be enemies. As you say, I owe you too much. What is it you desire?"—with forced amiability.

"Deprive Col. Annesley of his honor, that, as you say, is inevitable; but I love that girl as I would a child of my own, and I will not see her caught in a net of this sort, or wedded to a man whose government robs him of his manhood and individuality."

"Do not forget that I held my country first and foremost,"—proudly.

"Love has no country, nor laws, nor galling chains of incertitude. Love is magnificent only in that it gives all without question. You love this girl with reservations. You shall not have her. You shall not have even me, who loves you after a fashion, for I could never look upon you as a husband; in my eyes you would always be an accomplice."

"It is war, then?"—curtly.

"War? Oh, no; we merely sever our diplomatic relations," she purred.

"Madam, listen to me. I shall make one more attempt to win this girl honorably. For you are right; love to be love must be magnificent. If she accepts me, for her sake I will become an outcast, a man without a country. If she refuses me, I shall go on to the end. Speak to the colonel, madam; it is too late. Like myself, he has gone too far. Why did you open the way for me as you did? I should have been satisfied with a discontented clerk. You threw this girl across my path, indirectly, it is true; but nevertheless the fault is yours."

"I recognize it. At that time I did not realize how much you were to me."

"You are a strange woman. I do not understand you."

"Incompatibility. Come, the carriage is waiting. Let us be gone."

"You have spoiled the evening for me," said the count, as he threw her cloak across her shoulders.

"On the contrary, I have added a peculiar zest. No, let us go and appear before the world, and smile, and laugh, and eat, and gossip. Let the heart throb with a dull pain, if it will; the mask is ours to do with as we may."

"They were, in my opinion, two very unusual persons."

CHAPTER XVII.  
DINNER IS SERVED.

"Ha!"

Monsieur Pierre, having uttered this ejaculation, stepped back and rested his fat hands on his fat hips. As he surveyed the impromptu butler, a shade of perplexity spread over his oily face. He smoothed his imperial and frowned. This groom certainly looked right, but there was something lacking in his make-up, that indefinable something which is always found in the true servant—servility. There was no humility here, no hypocritical meekness, no servility; there was nothing sly or self-satisfied. In truth, there was something grimly earnest, which was not to be understood readily.

Monsieur Pierre, having always bustled himself with soups and curries and roasts and sauces, was not a profound analyst; yet his instinctive shrewdness at once told him that this fellow was no servant, nor could he ever be made into one. Though voluble enough in his kitchen, Monsieur Pierre lacked expression when confronted by any problem outside of it. Here was a regulation swallow-tail coat and trousers of green, the striped red vest, and the polished brass buttons; but the man inside was too much for him.

"Diable! You look right. But no, I can not explain. Let us see on your tongue, but eat rayfusse, Ha! I ha! eef! You lack vot zay call zee real. You make me tink of zee saivrant on zee stage, something better off; eh?"

This was as near as monsieur ever got to the truth of things.

During this speculative inventory, Warburton's face was gravely set; indeed, it pictured his exact feelings. He was grave. He even wanted Pierre's approval. He was about to pass through a very trying ordeal; he might not even pass through it. There was no deceiving his colonel's eyes, hang him! Whatever had induced fate to force this old Argus-eyed soldier upon the scene? He glanced into the kitchen mirror. He instantly saw the salient flaw in his dress. It was the cravat. Tie it as he would, it never approached the likeness of the conventional cravat of the waiter. It still remained a polished cravat, a worldly cravat, the cravat seen in ball-rooms, drawing-rooms, in the theater stalls and boxes, anywhere but in the servants' hall. Oh, for the ready-made cravat that hitched to the collar-button! And then there was that servant's low turned-down collar, glossy as celluloid. He felt as diffident in his bare throat as a debutante feels in her first décolleté ball-gown, not very well covered up, as it were. And heaven and earth, how appallingly large his hands had grown, how clumsy his feet! Would the colonel excuse him? Would he keep silent? This remained to be found out; wherein lay the terror of suspense.

"Remember," went on Monsieur Pierre, after a pause, feeling that he had a duty to fulfill and a responsibility to shift to other shoulders than his own, "remember, eef you spill zee soup, I heel you. You carry zee tureen in, zen you deesh out zee soup, and eef zee oysters should be on zee table zee minutes before zee guests ha' arrive. Now, can you make zee American cocktail?"

"I can,"—with a ghost of a smile. "Make heem,"—with a pompous

wave of the hand toward the favorite ingredients.

"What kind?"

"Vot kind! Eef zee more cocktails, zen?"

"Only two that are proper, the Manhattan and the martini."

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Warburton made one. Monsieur slipped it slowly, making a wry face, for, true Gaul that he was, only two kinds of stimulants appealed to his palate, liqueurs and wines. He found it as good as any he had ever tasted.

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James went out of doors to get a breath of fresh air and to collect his thoughts, which were wool-gathering, whatever that may mean. They needed collecting, these thoughts of his, and labeling, for they were at all points of the compass, and he was at a loss upon which to draw for support. Here he was, in a devil of a fix, and no possible way of escaping except by absolutely bolting; and he vowed that he wouldn't bolt, not if he stood the chance of being exposed 50 times over. He had danced; he was going to pay the fiddler like a man. He had never ran away from anything, and he wasn't going to begin now.

At the worst, they could only laugh at him; but his secret would be his no longer. As that he had been! How to tell this girl that he loved her? How to appear to her as his natural self? What a chance he had wiffully thrown away! He might have been a guest to-night; he might have sat next to her, turned the pages of her music, and perhaps sighed love in her ear, all of which would have been very proper and conventional. Ah, if he only knew what was going on behind those Mediterranean eyes of hers, those heavenly sapphires. Had she any suspicion? No, it could not be possible; she had humiliated him too often, to suspect the imposture. Alack-a-day!

Had any one else applied the disreputable terms he applied to himself there would have been a battle royal. When he became out of breath, he re-entered the house to have a final look at the table before the ordeal began.

Covers had been laid for 12; immaculate linen, beautiful silver, and sparkling cut-glass. He wondered how much the girl was worth, and thought of his own miserable \$4,500 the year. True, his capital could at any time be converted into cash, some \$75,000, but it would be no longer the goose with the golden egg. A great bowl of roses stood on a glass center-piece. As he leaned toward them to inhale their perfume he heard a sound. He turned.

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"Very well, Miss Annesley,"—with a sudden bold scrutiny.

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"You haven't the hands of a servant, James,"—quietly.

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"They are too clumsy," she went on maliciously.

"I am not a butler, Miss; I am a groom. I promise to do the very best I can." Wrath mingled with the shame on his face.

"A man who can do what you did this morning ought not to be afraid of a dinner-table."

"There is some difference between a dinner-table and a horse, Miss." He stooped to recover the fork while she touched her lips with her handkerchief. The situation was becoming unendurable. He knew that, for some reason, she was quietly laughing at him.

Never put back on the table a fork or piece of silver that has fallen to the floor," she advised. "Procure a clean one."

"Yes, Miss." Why in heaven's name didn't she go and leave him in peace? "And be very careful not to spill a drop of the burgundy. It is '78, and a particular favorite of my father's."

Seventy-eight! As if he hadn't had many a bottle of that superb vintage during the past ten months! The glands in his teeth opened at the memory of that taste.

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you to thank? Me. Ordinarily a woman does not do these things as a pastime. There must be some strong motive behind. You asked me why I have stirred you so. Perhaps it is because I am neither two-and-twenty nor you two-score. It is these little barbs that remain in a woman's heart. Well, I do not love you well enough to marry you, but I love you too well to permit you to marry Miss Annesley."

"That has the sound of war. I did love you that night,"—not without a certain nobility.

"How easily you say 'that night!' Surely there was wisdom in that smile of mine. And I nearly tumbled into

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deep affection, marshall though he was, for he was singularly just and merciful.

They had either drunk the cocktail or had set it aside untouched, and had emptied the oyster shells, when the ordeal of the soup began. Very few of those seated gave any attention to my butler. The first thing he did was to drop the silver ladle. Only the girl saw this mishap. She laughed; and Raleigh believed that he had told his story in an exceptionally taking manner. My butler quietly procured another ladle, and proceeded coolly enough. I must confess, however, that his coolness was the result of a physical effort. The soup quivered and trembled outrageously, and more than once he felt the heat of the liquid on his thumb. This moment his face was pale, that moment it was red. But, as I remarked, few observed him. Why should they? Everybody had something to say to everybody else; and a butler was only a machine anyway. Yet, three persons occasionally looked in his direction: his late colonel, Mrs. Chadwick and the girl, each from a different angle of vision. There was a scowl on the colonel's face, puzzlement on Mrs. Chadwick's, and I don't know what the girl's represented, not having been there with my discerning eyes.

Once the American countess raised her lorgnette and murmured: "What a handsome butler!"

Karloff, who sat next to her, twisted his mustache and shrugged. He had seen handsome peasants before. They did not interest him. He glanced across the table at the girl, and was much annoyed that she, too, was gazing at the butler, who had successfully completed the distribution of the soup and who now